

Pastoral Care: Origins, Definitions and Roles

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Case Study: The Role of the Form Tutor

George began his teaching career in the early 1980s in a large comprehensive school in the North of England, having gone straight from school to university and from there into his first teaching post. He was told on arrival at the school that he would, like every other junior member of staff, be allocated a form class. Nothing had been mentioned about the role of Form Tutor or about any pastoral issues during his Initial Teacher Education and nothing more was said by the school staff before the new term began.

As George explains, there were many challenges to face at the outset: 'I must admit that I was completely unprepared for the range of problems which came my way, especially during that first year: I had serious behavioural incidents to deal with almost on a daily basis, as well as truancy, bullying, parental separation and a sibling bereavement, all within the first year and all within a class of 28 year 9 boys. I had no idea what to do, and only for the support of my Head of Year, I would not have been able to cope. I was thinking on my feet all the time: sometimes I got it right but sometimes I just didn't!'

Despite this shaky start, George learned quickly and now, 30 years later, is Deputy Head (with pastoral responsibility) in another comprehensive school in the same neighbourhood. George is determined that more can and should be done to prepare new teachers for the realities of the modern classroom: 'I now allow all new teachers to shadow an experienced Form Tutor for a year when they arrive; I organise a series of induction sessions through that first year too to deal with common issues like bullying and family break-up; I support all requests for professional development courses if I can; and I keep an open door for anyone in my pastoral team to come and ask my advice.' However, George also believes that more could be done in Initial Teacher Education: 'We need more input on pastoral care in College before young teachers start out in the classroom. We owe it to them, and we owe it to the youngsters in their form groups. There's too much focus on the curriculum and on attainment, and not enough on supporting children's holistic development. School is not just about grades. It's about people.'

Questions

1. How common do you think George's initial experience as a Form Tutor still is today?
2. How appropriate do you find his in-school support for new pastoral staff?
3. What more can be done in Initial Teacher Education to prepare new teachers for the challenges of the role?

Research Example: Pastoral Care and School Improvement in Canada

Dean and Galloway (2008) chart the remarkable turnaround in the fortunes of South Simcoe Public School in Ontario, Canada. In 1991 South Simcoe was a failing school with low academic attainment, poor behaviour, recurrent vandalism and frequent complaints from local shops about thefts and disruption by its pupils. By 1997 however South Simcoe had become the most successful inner city school in Canada's largest province with 100 per cent of Grade 3 and 6 pupils gaining the top two levels in standardized mathematics tests. So how was this improvement achieved?

Dean and Galloway outline the key features of this model for improvement which came to be known as TWLTW – *Together We Light The Way*:

First, the model was based on the centrality of respectful relationships which was seen to underpin everything in the educational curriculum. Rather than being a 'bolt-on', the (pastoral) Respect programme was consistently integrated into the (academic) teaching of curriculum subjects. Indeed it was seen as the foundation for everything else on the basis that mutually respectful relationships are a precondition for progress in the curriculum.

Second, the programme sought to involve the local community in meaningful partnerships as local business people, police officers and parents contributed actively to the curriculum for instance by reading with the children or discussing their experience of work with them, thus further integrating the social and academic aims of the school. Unlike many traditional partnership models, South Simcoe thus treated the community not as a 'supporters club' but as valued assets and as curriculum and teaching resources.

Third, the programme for improvement was practitioner-led and was developed from within the school, rather than being imposed by government initiative from outside. It also built on teachers' existing skills and enhanced their confidence through targeted professional development.

Dean and Galloway thus conclude that the example of South Simcoe highlights the centrality of respectful relationships and an integrated pastoral/academic approach as the foundation for school improvement.

Reference

Dean, S. and Galloway, D. (2008), 'What can other schools learn from a failing school that turned around? Some suggestions from Canada'. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 26(3): 159–69.